United Nations

Daily Highlights

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ International Tribunal on war crimes in former Yugoslavia, meeting in The Hague, elects Antonio Cassese (Italy) as its President and Elizabeth Odio Benito (Costa Rica) as Vice-President.

+ In 18 months, Department of Humanitarian Affairs has coordinated system-wide response to humanitarian needs of 58.5 million people and to victims of 197 natural disasters, General Assembly President says as Assembly begins debate on United Nations humanitarian emergency assistance.

+ WFP approves emergency operation to provide relief assistance to 300,000 most needy refugees and displaced people in Azerbaijan; 926,000 in need of aid as a result of conflict with Armenia.

+ Germany informs Under-Secretary-General for Peace-Keeping Operations of possible reduction in German contingent in Somalia.

+ Fifth Meeting of Parties to Montreal Protocol on protection of ozone layer confirms that $455 million is needed over next three years for Protocol's Multilateral Fund to help developing countries apply control measures.

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The International Tribunal set up to prosecute serious violations of international humanitarian law in the former Yugoslavia, meeting in The Hague, Netherlands, yesterday elected Antonio Cassese (Italy) as its President and Elizabeth Odio Benito (Costa Rica) as its Vice-President. Mr. Cassese is a member of the Human Rights Commission appointed by the Italian Prime Minister and a delegate of the Italian Government to the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Human Rights. Mrs. Odio Benito has been Costa Rica's Minister of Justice since May 1990. The Tribunal's 11 Judges also elected the Officers and Members of the Appeals Chamber and Trial Chambers.

The Tribunal, which was established by the Security Council under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, has the power to prosecute persons alleged

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to have committed or ordered the commission of grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, violations of the laws or customs of war, crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide.

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General Assembly President Samuel R. Insanally (Guyana) told the Assembly this morning that since its establishment 18 months ago, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs had facilitated timely and coordinated system-wide response to the humanitarian needs of 58.5 million people in 26 countries, as well as to the victims of 107 natural disasters. He was opening the Assembly's consideration of ways of strengthening the coordination of United Nations humanitarian emergency assistance, and its review of the report of the Secretary-General on the matter.

The representative of Colombia, speaking on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, said it was important that humanitarian assistance be provided with neutrality and impartiality. He pointed out too that there had been numerous "silent" emergencies which did not get the attention of the international media, such as extreme poverty. It was no use responding to emergency disasters if the people could not return to their homes and resume work, he said. He appealed to the donor countries to consolidated appeals, stressing the necessity of increasing the resources of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund.

The representative of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the European Union, supported the call for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to determine the responsibilities of the various agencies involved in humanitarian assistance. He also highlighted the question of preventive security of staff involved in such assistance and condemned attacks against them. Although it was difficult to guarantee their safety, preventive measures must be emphasized, he said.

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The World Food Programme (WFP) has approved an emergency operation to provide relief assistance to 300,000 of the most vulnerable refugees and displaced people in Azerbaijan. WFP will urge donors to provide 9,000 metric tons of food commodities -- worth $7.2 million -- to meet the requirements of those most in need for six months. According to the most recent United Nations estimates, about 926,000 people in Azerbaijan need relief assistance as a result of the conflict with Armenia. This includes 251,000 refugees from Armenia and Uzbekistan.

Many of the displaced people and refugees are living on the road-sides with few belongings and rapidly dwindling food stocks. According to WFP, although the Government of Azerbaijan is committed to providing each refugee with a small monthly cash allowance, the country is not equipped to deal with a crisis of this magnitude.

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The Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations has informed Kofi Annan, Under-Secretary-General for Peace-Keeping Operations, of a possible reduction in the size of the German contingent in Somalia, a United Nations spokesman said today. The issue had been the subject of previous consultations between the German Mission and the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations.

The reduction was intended to readjust the capability of the German troops to the tasks entrusted to them, according to the spokesman. He said that the reduction should not be perceived as a withdrawal of the German contingent and that Mr. Annan fully understood the reason for it. As of the end of October, Germany had 1,731 troops in Somalia.

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The Fifth Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which took place this week in Bangkok, has confirmed that a total of $455 million will be needed from developed countries over the next three years for the Protocol's Multilateral Fund.

The Fund was established by the 78 parties to the Montreal Protocol to help developing countries put the Protocol's control measures into practice. It is used, at the request of national Governments, to cover the costs of developing programmes for phasing out the production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances, including aerosols, foams, refrigeration and air-conditioning plants, solvents and halons.

Established as a $240 million interim facility for 1991-1993, the Fund is financed by contributions from industrialized countries. An Executive Committee, assisted by a secretariat, approves the allocation of funds and develops guidelines for its administration. Four agencies are involved in its implementation: the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the World Bank.

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